

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7128

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 1097

E.9 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, CI

SUBJECT: MORE COMIC OPERA FROM THE LABOR MINISTER

1. SUMMARY: IN EMBARRASSING INCIDENT, LABOR MINISTER AIR FORCE GENERAL NICANOR DIAZ ESTRADA ORDERED THE SUSPENSION OF A FEB. 9 ASSEMBLY OF COPPER WORKER CONFEDERATION (CTC) LEADERS, THOUGH MEETING HAD BEEN APPROVED BY THE GOC. THE MEETING, CALLED TO DISCUSS SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM, HAD BEEN PUBLICIZED FOR A WEEK AND THE MINISTER HAD PERSONALLY BEEN INVITED BY CTC TOP LEADERS (AND GIVEN HIS ACCEPTANCE), BUT HE WAS EVIDENTLY MIFFED AT RECEIVING THE WRITTEN INVITATION ONLY ON THE MORNING OF THE EVENT.

2. INTERIOR MINISTRY AND JUNTA OFFICIALS APPROVED RESUMPTION OF THE SESSION LATER IN THE DAY. THEY WERE REPORTEDLY CONCERNED AT OUTSIDE REACTION, SINCE SEVERAL FOREIGN INVITEES INCLUDING US LABATT AND ILO DIRECTOR WERE PRESENT WHEN GROUP WAS DISPERSED. LABOR MINISTRY OFFICIAL LATER APOLOGIZED TO LABATT AND CONFIDED THAT JUNTA WAS CONCERNED AND EMBARRASSED BY DIAZ' "INEXPLICABLE" ACTIONS.

3. EVENT IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF DIAZ' ERRATIC PERFORMANCE WHICH HAS ISOLATED HIM FROM ANY MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION WITH LABOR MOVEMENT. END SUMMARY.

4. IN FULL VIEW OF PRESS, TV CAMERAMEN, AND FOREIGN VISITORS (INCLUDING THE DIRECTOR OF THE ILO IN CHILE), MILITARY INTEL-
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LIGENCE SERVICE (SIM) AGENTS INTERRUPTED, CLOSED AND DIS-

PERSED THE PARTICIPANTS OF A MEETING OF COPPER WORKER CONFEDERATION (CTC) LEADERS ON THE MORNING OF FEB 9. THE TWO PRINCIPAL OFFICERS OF THE CTC WERE ESCORTED TO THE OFFICES OF THE LOCAL MILITARY COMMANDER (JEFE DE PLAZA) WHERE THEY WERE CALLED ON TO EXPLAIN WHY THEY WERE CONDUCTING AN ILLEGAL MEETING. THEY PRODUCED A DOCUMENT DATED JAN 24 AND SIGNED BY THE ACTING MINISTER OF INTERIOR WHICH CLEARLY AUTHORIZED THE MEETING (LABATT SAW THE DOCUMENT LATER). ACCORDING TO CTC PRESIDENT GUILLERMO SANTAUIJA, THE COMMANDER APOLOGIZED AND INFORMED THEM THAT LABOR MINISTER NICANOR DIAZ HAD CALLED EARLIER IN THE MORNING AND ORDERED THE MEETING BROKEN UP "BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO AUTHORIZATION AND I HAVE JUST NOW RECEIVED MY INVITATION."

5. IRONICALLY, THE MEETING WAS BEING HELD FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING GOC PROPOSALS ON SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM. MINISTER DIAZ INVITED AND URGED THIS TYPE OF ASSEMBLY WHEN HE PUBLICLY PRESENTED THE SS PROPOSALS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. WHEN THE SIM AGENTS ARRIVE, A LABOR MINISTRY EXPERT IN SOCIAL SECURITY WAS PRESENTING THE GOC'S POSITION IN FAVOR OF THE REFORMS. SANTANA AND CTC GENSECY PEDRO TAPIA CLAIM THAT ON FEB 3 THEY PERSONALLY CALLED ON DIAZ, INVITED HIM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INAUGURAL SESSION AND RECEIVED HIS ACCEPTANCE OF THE INVITATION. THEY PRODUCED A MESSENGER LOG WHICH INDICATED A LABOR MINISTRY OFFICIAL SIGNED ACCEPTANCE FOR THE CONTROVERSIAL WRITTEN INVITATION ON FEB 4.

6. MEETING WAS RESUMED AT 3:00 P.M. WITH FULL APPROVAL OF THE GOC. WHILE THERE HAD BEEN NUMEROUS PRESS ACCOUNTS ANNOUNCING THE MEETING DURING THE DAYS PRIOR TO THE INAUGURAL SESSION, ONLY ONE "OFFICIAL VERSION" OF THE INCIDENT APPEARED ON FEB 10. THIS VERSION MILDLY SLAPPED THE WRISTS OF THE CTC LEADERS FOR FAILING TO FOLLOW THE CORRECT PROCEDURES IN REQUESTING PERMISSION.

7. DURING THE AFTERNOON THE LABATT (WHO WAS AMONG FOREIGN GUESTS AT THE INTERRUPTED SESSION) WAS CALLED BY TWO LABOR MINISTRY OFFICIALS WHO EACH OFFERED OBLIQUE APOLOGIES FOR "UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT" AND CAUTIOUSLY SOLICITED HIS REACTION TO EVENT. THE SAME EVENING A FRIEND FROM THE MINISTRY CONFIDENTIAL

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STATED THAT "THE SKY FELL ON THE MINISTER DURING THE AFTERNOON." HE INDICATED THAT INCIDENT HAD BEEN CAUSED BY "IMPULSIVE AND INEXPLICABLE ACTION OF THE MINISTER" IN ORDERING MEETING BROKEN UP. HE CLAIMED THAT DIAZ' ACTIONS OVER THE PAST YEAR HAVE ALMOST COMPLETELY ISOLATED HIM FROM LABOR AND HAVE CREATED AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AMBIENCE AMONG MINISTRY OFFICIALS.

8. COMMENT: THE INCIDENT IS BUT ANOTHER
EXAMPLE OF LABOR MINISTER DIAZ' ERRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN
PERFORMANCE DURING HIS ALMOST TWO YEARS IN OFFICE (SEE
75 SANTIAGO 3040). HIS ACTIONS CONFUSE EVEN MOST RABID
LABOR SUPPORTERS OF GOC. HE HAS APPARENTLY BECOME MORE
TESTY AND UNPREDICTABLE BECAUSE OF HIS ISOLATION FROM THEM.
HE OBVIOUSLY DOES NOT HAVE THE MOST POPULAR PRODUCT TO SELL
TO ORGANIZED LABOR (CONSIDERING THE EFFECT OF THE GOC'S
ECONOMIC POLICY AND TIGHT RESTRICTIONS ON LABOR) BUT MOST
CONTENT THAT HE SHOULD AND COULD DO IT MORE GRACIOUSLY AND
WITH FEWER OF THESE UNSEEMLY EPISODES.

9. IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND WHY GOC RETAINS DIAZ IN
POSITION WHERE HE GUARANTEES UNNECESSARILY POOR RELATIONS
WITH ORGANIZED LABOR. APPARENTLY JUNTA RATES ORGANIZED LABOR
LOW IN ITS CONCERNS. THIS IS LIKELY TO PROVE A COSTLY ERROR,
IN LONG RUN.
POPPER

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